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ABSTRACT

Beginning teachers were studied from the completion of student teaching through the first nine weeks of instruction as professional teachers. Data was collected at the end of student teaching, the end of school orientation, and at the end of the third and ninth weeks of teaching. In addition, they reported their concerns and problems and the means they employed for coping with them. The changing priority of concerns is recorded in this report, along with the coping strategies most frequently used. Results revealed a pervading sense of isolation during the first weeks of teaching, and a realization that their perceptions of teaching, up to the time they began working with pupils, had been distorted. Talking with others, preferably other teachers, was the main coping technique used for relieving anxiety. Two suggestions are made for improving teacher training and induction: teacher education programs must consider the provision of a year of internship, and schools should provide well organized internal support systems for beginning teachers. (JD)

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PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF BEGINNING TEACHERS: A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

by

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There is widespread belief that the experiences an individual has with educational institutions are more powerful determinants of their behaviors as teachers than their formal training programs. Further, some believe that a teacher's experiences during the induction period of teaching are "more powerful determinants than experiences gained during other spans of time." (Fenstermacher, 1979) Lortie (1975) notes that entry to teaching differs markedly from entry into many other forms of work. A teacher's entry into the workplace is not eased through apprenticeship or internship. Almost overnight, beginning teachers are expected to become fully responsible for instructing their pupils. In fact, they are usually expected to perform the same tasks as 25 year veterans (Tisher, 1979).

What happens to teachers as they shift from the college campus to the workplace of the school? How do they cope with the many dramatic changes they experience in their responsibilities as they are transformed from teacher trainee into teacher? The University of Houston College of Education began seeking answers to these questions in the spring of 1979 when a follow up of graduates of its teacher education program was begun. The purpose of the study was to identify the concerns and problems experienced by beginning teachers and the mechanisms they employed to cope with these. Graduates were studied during the initial induction phase of their teaching, defined as that period from the completion of student teaching through the first nine weeks of instruction as a beginning teacher.

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Methodology

During the spring of 1979, graduating student teachers were visited in their education classes by faculty who explained the purpose of the follow-up study and invited students to participate. Thirty students volunteered.

During the period from May 1 through November 15, 1979, data were collected from these participants on six different occasions. Group meetings were held on May 1 (end of student teaching), August 23 (end of orientation sessions conducted by school districts for new teachers), September 13 (end of beginning teachers' third week with pupils), and November 15 (end of beginning teachers' ninth week with pupils). In addition, participants were asked to record their concerns and problems and the means they employed for coping with these on audio tapes at the conclusion of their first and sixth week with pupils. These tapes were mailed to the investigators.

Procedures used to collect data during the group sessions included completion of the Teacher Concerns Questionnaire developed by the University of Texas Research and Development Center designed to measure concerns of teachers in the areas of self, task and impact. Self-reports, designed to elicit information concerning problems encountered and coping mechanisms employed, were obtained through the use of open-ended questionnaires and audio recordings of group interactions and individual reports.

Concerns at the End of Student Teaching

On May 1, prospective teachers were asked to respond to two questions regarding the problems they perceived themselves facing as teachers. This occurred just as they were completing their student teaching assignments.

The first question was "Think about next fall as you begin to teach. What problems do you now believe you will face?" Their responses appear in Table 1. Responses are ordered in terms of frequency mentioned.

Table 1

Perceived Problems as of May 1

1. Discipline and classroom management
2. Organization of class (including grouping students)
3. Lack of materials and supplies
4. Planning and preparation; lack of time
5. Knowing school procedures, processes, and rules
6. Meeting school's expectations; paperwork
7. Being sued; extent of liability; responsibility for accidents
8. Knowing what to teach; ability to teach the skills students need
9. Exhaustion; getting "burned out"
10. Relations with other teachers
11. Working with parents
12. Knowing names of students, teachers, parents
13. Keeping students interested
14. Living on teachers' salary
15. Combining personal and professional life

Discipline and classroom management was the problem most often mentioned by prospective teachers. Eighty percent of the respondents listed this as a problem on the questionnaire and general consensus was reached in the group session that this was their most pressing problem. Related to this general problem were concerns about students' reactions to them as teachers, keeping students interested, and knowing students' names.

Several problems focused on planning for instruction. Prospective teachers were concerned with organizing classes (particularly when large groups of students were involved in classes such as P.E.); planning and preparation; knowing what to teach; and demonstrating the ability to actually teach.

Knowing about school procedures and rules was an important concern of a majority of prospective teachers. They also were concerned about paperwork required of teachers and adequately meeting school expectations. Human relations was a concern. Getting along with their colleagues, and with parents were perceived as potential problems they felt they would face as beginning teachers.

Possible legal problems were mentioned as a concern. Prospective teachers wondered about their personal responsibility for accidents, the extent of their liability, how to keep from being sued, and what they would do if they were.

Finally, prospective teachers were concerned about their personal lives. How to deal with exhaustion, how to keep from becoming burned out, how to live on a teacher's salary, and how to combine personal and professional roles all were mentioned.

Problems During Student Teaching

Another question asked students was to think back over student teaching and list the major problems they faced during that experience. These are summarized in Table 2.

When one reads the list of problems which these students faced as student teachers, several patterns emerge. First, these problems are much more specific than those they project for themselves as beginning teachers. Second, these problems focus heavily on human relations skills--with students, teachers, parents. There is a sense that "others" are not living up to these student teachers' idealistic expectations. There is also a sense of frustration that the prospective teacher's skills are inadequate to bring about needed changes.

Table 2

Problems Faced During Student Teaching

Lack of time for preparation, grading papers
Learning the system
Supplying materials myself for class
Children using curse words
Children fighting
Children having home problems that affect learning
Management
Lack of communication with other grade levels
Gossip or petty problems in lounge
Differences in philosophy with principal
Lack of parental concern or help
Fear of losing control
Timing (too long on one activity)
Verbalization (talk too much)
Overwhelmed by amount of material needed to teach
Sense of alienation from co-workers
Fear of supervision
Paperwork
No school counselors
Large groups
Lunchroom discipline
Outside R & R
Learning students' names
Humor to keep tension down and learning fun
Other teachers not being helpful
Me--I wanted to do too good
Confidence
Not able to teach what I want or the students want/need
Student apathy
Voice projection
Noise level of children
Exaggeration by students to parents of assignments
Apathy
Skill level
Lying
Not knowing what teaching aids were available to me
Meeting deadlines for paperwork--lesson plans, grading papers
Being treated as an equal by other faculty and staff
Keeping students from making fun of each other
Believing students who always had an emergency

Concerns Just Prior to Opening of School

On August 23, each beginning teacher wrote a letter to himself/herself describing how he/she felt and what his/her concerns were about entering teaching. Some had already participated in two days of new teacher orientation; others had yet to go to school. Almost all began their letter with a general description of their feelings. More than three-fourths used the word "excited" as they looked forward to a new experience and a new phase of their lives. Within the context of this general perception, they noted a number of concerns. Their concerns are summarized in Table 3 and listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Table 3

Concerns of Beginning Teachers Just Prior to Opening of School

1. Identifying administrative and management details connected with beginning classes
2. Establishing good relationships in the school; concern for what teachers are like; are they open, friendly; will they accept me
3. Feel inadequate to teach new grade level or subject matter
4. Anxious to do well in the estimation of my teaching partner
5. Teacher - parent conferences
6. Working with lower socio-economic Blacks or bilingual students
7. Room seems too empty
8. Personal life pressures (graduation, wedding, guests, housepainting) have detracted from my mental preparation for teaching
9. Discipline problem I cannot handle
10. Organize my students and activities enough to enjoy the job and like myself
11. Being too unstructured
12. Stimulating students
13. Getting a job (still waiting to hear; resigned to substituting)
14. Knowing what subjects I will teach since assignments have not been made
15. Teaching the material students need in an adequate manner
16. Afraid of defeat and let-down, and hope not to meet these two feelings too often

The first four concerns were voiced by a number of beginning teachers. They were concerned with handling school routines, doing well in the eyes of the administration and fellow teachers, and about content or grade levels they had not previously taught. But while concerned about what was to happen, these beginning teachers believed in themselves, had received positive feedback by having been offered a job (with two exceptions), and looked forward to working with children and youth. The mood of their letters was euphoric. The precise, incident-related concerns and problems listed as important during student teaching were not evident.

Coping Strategies

Beginning teachers were asked to describe what they were doing to deal with their concerns and problems. The focus of this question was on identifying their coping skills and styles. These are summarized in Table 4 and listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Talking and coping were apparently synonymous for teachers as their first teaching job approached. They talked with their principal, team leader, fellow teachers, other teachers and substitutes, their husband, their children; in fact, anyone who would listen and might help them gain perspective. The content of the coping focused on general perception of teaching and better understanding of school activities.

Some tried to rationalize their fears, one tried yoga, some thought about their concerns, while others decided to simply do nothing and wait for real fears to materialize. The coping styles of individuals when concerned with their personal reactions were as varied as the number of people in the study.

Several teachers coped by planning for the beginning of school. Others read books in their field, methods textbooks, and guides to better classroom management.

Table 4

Coping Skills as Identified Just Prior to Opening School

Discuss with my team leader, principal
One anxiety attack with a very understanding husband
Taking yoga and dance will assure non-school related activity
Trying to get everything ready for the change from non-working to working schedule
Sounding out fellow teachers
Rereading management tactics and suggestions, methods, tests, and other books
Talked with subs and teachers who have worked with similar groups
Trying to rationalize my fears and hope I cope better this time planning
A lot of thinking
Talking with my children
Talking my concerns through with just about anyone who will listen
Let time take care of concerns; doing nothing; waiting to go and see what it's all about

Just as the problems of teaching had not yet surfaced for these teachers, the coping styles tended to be non-specific and generalized. What they would do when confronted with real problems was yet to be faced.

Concerns as of the End of the Third Week with Students

On September 13, the beginning teachers wrote another letter describing how they felt and what their concerns were. By this time all of them had been in the classroom for a minimum of thirteen days. The dawning realities of teaching and being a teacher were present in their stated feelings and concerns. These are summarized in Table 5. Responses are listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Table 5

Concerns of Beginning Teachers at the End of the Third Week

1. Time spent on paper work and trival details
2. Not enough time to plan and prepare
3. Disorganized--unable to manage student, resources, and the schedule
4. Being inadequate--unable to apply what I know and control the situation
5. Inability to maintain order in the classroom
6. Not reaching every student
7. Want students to enjoy school

Almost every respondent in one way or another listed time as a concern. They did not have enough time to do what they thought needed to be done. Some blamed the lack of time on the reports and papers that were required and the endless meetings. Others blamed it on their own inability to organize and manage. Part of the organizational and management concerns was the problem of controlling students. The obvious theme underlying the concerns expressed was the unstated question, "How am I going to survive in this time demanding and uncontrolled world?"

Coping Strategies

Beginning teachers were asked to report on how they solved the problems they encountered during the first weeks at school. Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

The most frequently mentioned coping devices at the end of three weeks of teaching were planning and preparing. Be ready and armed for the next day was the way to survive, even if it took all night.

Table 6

Coping Skills as Identified at the End of Three Weeks

1. Planning every night
2. Preparing materials every night
3. Talking with other teachers
4. Talking with the principal
5. Talking with spouse
6. Crying
7. Reading books
8. Using material from student teaching

They continued to seek resolution for their concerns through conversations with others. Most often it was with other teachers or with the principal. And, when no "professional" was around and the frustrations were still peaking, a spouse, a child, or a good cry was used.

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

During the September 13 meeting, the beginning teachers were asked if they had any suggestions for improving their preparation programs. Their responses are summarized in Table 7 and listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Table 7

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

1. Specific preparation for "beginning of school" procedures
2. Methods and techniques of dealing with paper work
3. More psychology and child development courses
4. Ways of dealing with the principal
5. Ways of working with parents
6. Information about school policies

Concerns at the End of the Ninth Week With Students

On November 15, the beginning teachers wrote their final letter describing how they felt and what their concerns were. These are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Concerns of Beginning Teachers at the End of the Ninth Week

1. Successfully meeting the needs of students
2. Keeping students interested and motivated
3. Relating and reporting to parents
4. Classroom management
5. Organizing and managing reading groups
6. How much is expected of a teacher--paper work, telephone calls, etc.
7. Not enough time to organize and plan for my teaching
8. Not enough time for myself

A number of beginning teachers commented that "I love teaching" and "teaching is everything I expected it to be." A smaller number of these beginning teachers appeared to be "just making it from one day to the next in hope that this year will end soon and next year will not be as bad."

These responses show a shift in the type of concerns experienced in the majority of participants. There is an increased concern about students and parents and less concern about management related problems. Some of the beginning teachers seem to have learned how to cope with lack of time, papers, reports, etc.

Coping Strategies

The respondents were asked to report on the coping strategies they were using at the end of the nine weeks period. Their responses are summarized in Table 9 and listed in order of frequency mentioned.

Table 9

Coping Skills as Identified at the End of Nine Weeks

1. Discussions with other teachers
2. Discussions with the principal
3. Conferences with parents
4. Spending more time at school and less time at home planning and preparing
5. Relating positively to individual students
6. Becoming my own supporter
7. Keep working and keep my mouth shut
8. Right now I am just learning to cope with it
9. Just living through it and hoping the second year will be better

The most frequently reported coping device was conversation with other teachers or with the principal. This is a shift from September 13, when planning and preparation took first and second place respectively.

Some of the beginning teachers seem to be in command of their situation while others do not. A small number of the total continue to use coping skills that the majority used earlier.

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

As in September, the teachers were asked again in November if they had any suggestions for improving their preparation programs. The responses are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

1. Move involvement with real classroom situations
2. More work with students from lower social and economic backgrounds
3. Preparation for dealing with parents
4. Work with reading groups that have a wide range of achievement
5. More work with management
6. More courses on child development
7. Information about how much pressure and responsibility a teacher truly has

As the time passed from the first of school to the end of the ninth week, some of the suggestions made by beginning teachers shifted in emphasis. It would probably be wise to consider Tables 7 and 10 combined when seeking ideas for improving preparation programs. One item worth noting, however, is that almost all respondents mentioned items 1, 2, 3, in Table 10 as critical to their preparation as beginning teachers.

Comparison of Concerns Revealed by the TCQ

The Teacher Concerns Questionnaire (TCQ) was developed to measure the concerns of teachers in three areas: self, task, and impact. In the late 1960's, Dr. Frances Fuller and her associates studied the concerns of perservice and inservice teachers and identified three areas of concern that theoretically were developmentally related.

> Neophyte teachers are initially most concerned about themselves. They want to be liked by their students, to be accepted by other teachers, and to be evaluated favorably by their supervisors. As these self concerns are resolved, concerns about the task of teaching become more prominent. Inexperienced teachers feel under pressure much of the time, seem to have too many students and too few instructional materials, and are confused about the priorities of the system. Only after both self concerns and task concerns have been dealt with successfully, do concerns about impact begin to predominate (George, 1978).

In studies of preservice and inservice teachers, Fuller and her associates found that self concerns tend to be high among education students who have not taught at all and among student teachers. At the completion of their student teaching and during the early months as beginning teachers, Fuller found that teachers tend to have task concerns. They are "concerned about their ability to manage the tasks involved in teaching: controlling the class, knowing the lessons, being accepted by students and other teachers, winning the approval of their supvisors (George, 1978). Later, after teachers have resolved self and task concerns, some become concerned about their effect on students and about how they might change what they do as teachers or modify the learning environment in ways that would better facilitate student learning. This phase, the impact phase, is not reached by all teachers. According to Rutherford (1975), it is often impossible to resolve successfully task concerns given the difficult, complex, and rapidly changing situation typical in many schools.

Figure 1 shows the concerns of participants in this study for the period May 1 through November 15 as identified by the TCQ. Self concerns remain high and fairly consistent from the end of student teaching through the first three weeks of beginning teaching. These concerns begin to taper off by the end of student teaching, dip to their lowest at the conclusion of orientation sessions for new teachers and rise over the initial weeks of beginning teaching. Impact concerns are highest at the end of student teaching, possibly explained by the somewhat unrealistic view of teaching which these students may have had

regarding teaching as suggested by their tendency to generalize and idealize about the problems they would encounter as beginning teachers. Impact concerns dipped to their lowest point at the end of orientation sessions and then rose during the first nine weeks of teaching.

The concerns of these students were not too different from those which could have been predicted by Fuller's earlier work. They would seem fairly well supported by data obtained during group sessions held with them.

Summary and Conclusions

While this study had many limitations, it does provide opportunity to develop insights into the world of the beginning teacher and to relate that world to programs of teacher preparation. In summary, the teachers we studied appeared to feel alone and isolated during their first weeks as teachers. They had a distorted picture of what the realities of teaching would be up to the time they began their work with pupils present in the classroom. Their expectations were not congruent with the experiences they had during those first weeks. They were overwhelmed and exhausted by what seemed to be endless paper work and reports, and by the importance they perceived administrators placed on these aspects of teaching.

Before these beginning teachers began actually working with pupils in their own classrooms, they tended to generalize and idealize the problems they thought they would encounter. Interestingly, they reported specific detailed problems encountered during their student teaching but apparently did not relate those experiences to the anticipated world of the beginning teacher. When their expectations were dashed in the face of increasingly alarming difficulties, their primary means of coping was to talk. They sought a sympathetic ear and counsel anywhere they could find it--particularly in other teachers and their principals. Tisher (1979) has suggested that the

induction phase of teaching is greatly eased when beginning teachers are among supportive, sympathetic colleagues. He quotes one inexperienced teacher who says:

> The staff in a school can make or break you, whereas children are much the same all round. If you have a good intergrated and supporting staff it makes life a lot easier.

This appears supported by the experiences and perception of these beginning teachers.

One thing seems clear when the experiences of these beginning teachers are analyzed. They either did not have the ability or could not find access to professional resources to aid them in coping with their problems. They were not protected and eased into their professional responsibilities as they would have been had they been serving as an intern on a professional team (as in the case of medical training) or under the direct supervision of a senior member of the profession (as in an apprenticeship). These teachers were expected to <u>be</u> teachers when they arrived on the scene. The problems this created are documented in the preceding pages. Many of these problems become relatively minor concerns as teachers gain experience; they could be easily "taken in stride" by beginning teachers if professional support systems were available to ease their entry into the real world of teaching.

Teacher training institutions may never be able to prepare beginning teachers adequately <u>unless</u> preservice teachers are provided opportunity to experience fully the <u>responsibilities</u> of teaching. These beginning teachers were trained in a program in which approximately fifty percent of their time was spent in actual public school classrooms--observing, serving as teacher aides, student teaching. It is doubtful that they could have spent more time in field activities due to competing pressures of campus requirements on their time. These teachers were also trained in a competency based program where

the behaviors they were expected to demonstrate had been derived from actual and conceptual teaching role models. They were expected to demonstrate their ability to teach, not just write or talk about it. Yet, they were unprepared for teaching. Perhaps two suggestions might be made:

1. Teacher preparation programs must consider the provision of a year of internship as an imperative for adequately training teachers. It has been recommended by the AACTE Bicentennial Commission on Education for the Profession of Teaching that "the internship in teacher education be defined as a minimum of one year of supervised employment and that it be made an integral part of all teacher preparation programs." (Howsam, 1976)

2. Employing educational institutions should consider the importance of providing well organized support systems in school buildings and in school districts for beginning teachers. They will seek assistance because they have serious problems and their needs are acute. The type of assistance they get will prove a powerful factor in their future behavior as teachers. Better to have professionally competent and easily accessible resources for beginning teachers to rely upon than to trust this important learning period to chance.

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